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SUBJECT: MUQTADA AL SADR MEETS WITH AYATOLLAH AL SISTANI: OFFERS
"ASSISTANCE"

CLASSIFIED BY: Alfred Fonteneau, RC, REO Al Hillah, Department
of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a SET Najaf Cable.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY. According to two independent sources, on March 30, in a hastily arranged meeting, Muqtada Al Sadr met with Ayatollah Al Sistani to discuss recent events and solicit the Ayatollah's advice. Sistani reportedly told Sadr that he had to remain peaceful and continue to help Iraqis, particularly those displaced by sectarian violence. Sadr offered to provide security for important Shi'a sites throughout Iraq. Sistani declined the offer. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (C) SET Najaf staff spoke with a contact working in Muqtada's retinue as well as a contact close to Ayatollah Fayyad (strictly protect both sources). SET Najaf's sources told us that on the evening of March 30, Muqtada Al Sadr met with Ayatollahs Sistani, Al Najafi, and Al Hakim at Sistani's home. Sadr had requested the meeting earlier that day.

[1](#)5. (C) Reportedly, Sadr opened the meeting by requesting advice on how best to respond to recent "attacks" on Sadrists in Baghdad and Najaf. Sistani told Sadr that he "must remain in peace in order to serve Islam and Muslims."

[1](#)6. (C) Sadr reportedly offered protection for holy shrines and also for the assembled Ayatollahs' homes. He stated that he could offer a level of protection greater than that of the Iraqi police or private security forces. According to SET Najaf's sources, Sistani declined with thanks to Sadr's offer, noting that the present level of security was adequate and there did not seem to be a present threat that would require a change.

[1](#)7. (C) Comment: It is no coincidence that Sadr would meet with the Marjaya'a at this point. There are numerous reports of Sadr moving "forces" into the province as part of the commemoration of the death of Mohammed. The recent conflicts between Mahdi militia and coalition forces have clearly gotten Sadr's attention. It is likely that he went to the Hawza for tacit, if unwitting approval of action against Coalition Forces. This suggests a scenario of Sadr loyalists becoming a regularized extra-governmental security force in Najaf province, undertaking manning checkpoints (an effort already underway) and openly guarding large parts of Najaf city. If the Ayatollahs were to legitimize these "forces", any perceived provocation would elicit a violent response by Sadrist forces. It appears that, for the time being, the Hawza are not comfortable with lending their reputation to Sadr's power consolidation tactics. End Comment

FONTENEAU